



Public Health Bulletin

A Publication of the Public Health Department, Jess Montoya., Director • www.slopublichealth.org
2191 Johnson Avenue • P.O. Box 1489 • San Luis Obispo, CA 93406 • (805) 781-5500 • (805) 781-5543 fax

Gregory Thomas, M.D., M.P.H.



Health Officer Notes...

I would like to welcome Jess Montoya as the new Health Agency Director. He started on February 28, 2005 and has worked in Nevada and Kings Counties. The Health Agency will be comprised of the Public Health Department and Behavioral Health (Mental Health and Drug and Alcohol Services).

Valley Fever Project

Coccidioidomycosis (Valley Fever) causes 50 to 80 cases of pneumonia and/or meningitis per year in San Luis Obispo County. Kern County has the highest number of cases yearly, on average 6-10 times as many as San Luis Obispo.

A vaccine development project needs significant funding. If you are interested in becoming involved in the project, contact Henry Herrera at 781-1564. For further information, visit the web site at www.valleyfever.com.

Be a Skeeter Defeater

Spring is mosquito season and West Nile Virus is an increasing threat. Keeping window screens in place and in good repair is one of the major mosquito bite prevention measures that should be practiced at home.

Pregnant Women Should Avoid Alcohol, Surgeon General Says

U.S. Surgeon General Richard H. Carmona warns pregnant women and women who may become pregnant to abstain from alcohol consumption in order to eliminate the chance of giving birth to a baby with any of the harmful effects of the Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD). FASD is the full spectrum of birth defects caused by prenatal alcohol exposure.

The spectrum may include mild and subtle changes, such as a slight learning disability and /or physical abnormality, through full-blown Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, which can include severe learning disabilities, growth deficiencies, abnormal facial features, and central nervous system disorders. This updates the 1981 Surgeon General's Advisory that suggested that pregnant women limit the amount of alcohol they drink.

"We must prevent all injury and illness that is preventable in society, and alcohol-related birth defects are completely preventable," Dr. Carmona said. "We do not know what, if any, amount of alcohol is safe.

"What we do know is that the risk of a baby being born with any of the fetal alcohol spectrum disorders, increased with the amount a pregnant woman drinks, as does the likely severity of the condition. When a pregnant woman drinks alcohol, so does her baby. Therefore, it's in the child's best interest for a pregnant woman to simply not drink alcohol."

In addition, studies indicate that a baby could be affected by alcohol consumption within the earliest weeks after conception, even before a woman knows that she is pregnant. For that reason, the Surgeon General is recommending that women who may become pregnant also abstain from alcohol.

"Thanks to our ever-increasing body of scientific knowledge we are now able to identify more and more causes of premature births and birth defects," said Dr. Carmona. "We must use this knowledge, not for knowledge's sake, but for the sake of the health of children everywhere."

For more information, please call 781-5592.

Highlights in this Issue:

Medicare to Cover Cessation Counseling for Some Smokers	2
Free Medical Care Available to Uninsured Children	2
County Clinical Lab Provides Services to Physicians, Clinics	3
Tips for "Welcome to Medicare Visits"	3
Communicable Disease Table	4

Medicare to Cover Cessation Counseling for Some Smokers

Medicare will cover the cost of smoking cessation counseling for beneficiaries with diseases caused or complicated by tobacco use, Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) officials announced, the AP/Long Island Newsday reports (Freking, AP/Long Island Newsday, 3/22). According to the Centers for Disease Control, 9.3% of U.S. residents ages 65 and older smoke cigarettes, and 300,000 seniors die of smoking-related diseases annually.

CMS estimates that smoking-related health problems accounted for about 10%, or \$20.5 billion, of total Medicare costs in 1997. Under the decision announced on Tuesday, Medicare will cover counseling for beneficiaries with diseases caused by tobacco use, such as cardiovascular disease, lung disease, weak bones, blood clots and cataracts. CMS said that treatments for those diseases account for the largest share of Medicare costs. In addition, Medicare will cover smoking cessation counseling for beneficiaries who take medications for diabetes, hypertension, blood clots and depression because tobacco use can reduce the efficacy of such treatments.

Medicare will begin to cover smoking cessation products, such as nicotine patches and gum, when the new prescription drug benefit begins in 2006, provided that the products are prescribed by a physician (Corbett Dooren, Wall Street Journal, 3/23). CMS officials said they did not have a cost estimate for the coverage of smoking cessation counseling. However, Ronald Sturm, a senior economist at the RAND Institute, said that because Medicare will only cover two smoking cessation attempts annually -- each with as many as four counseling sessions -- the cost likely will remain limited. In a seven-state pilot program conducted between November 2002 and December 2004, Medicare paid \$32 per smoking cessation counseling session.

The decision announced on Tuesday "has great potential to save lives and improve lives for millions of seniors," CMS Administrator Mark McClellan said. Officials for the American Medical Association praised the decision.

Ronald Davis, an AMA trustee, said, "Studies have shown that seniors who try to quit smoking are 50% more likely to succeed than all other age groups, and seniors who quit can reduce their risk of death from heart disease to that of nonsmokers within two to three years after quitting." However, Sturm said that most beneficiaries likely will not quit smoking "in their last few years" (AP/Long Island Newsday, 3/22).

For information on free, local stop smoking counseling services, call the San Luis Obispo County Tobacco Control Program at 781-5564.

*Derived from the CaliforniaHealthline, which is published daily for California HealthCare Foundation by The Advisory Board Company.
© 2004 The Advisory Board Company. All Rights Reserved.*

Free Medical Care Available to Uninsured Children

SLO Healthy Kids is a new health plan that will provide comprehensive medical, vision, and dental care for uninsured, underprivileged children.

This program is for children birth to age 18 in families with incomes at or below 300% of the Federal Poverty Level (a family of four with an annual income of \$58,000) who are not eligible for existing public programs. Coverage will begin July 1, 2005.

Uninsured children are five times more likely to be treated in an emergency room, the only alternative for the uninsured.

In contrast, health insurance links families to a primary care physician, eliminating the need for costly emergency room treatment, care which is ultimately paid for by consumers and taxpayers.

If you know of a child that needs health insurance please ask their parent or guardian to call 781-1606.

You can also "Sponsor a Healthy Kid" by providing a tax-deductible donation that covers the cost of one insurance premium for one year. Your Healthy Kid donation will be matched with funds provided by the San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors.

Other funders include First 5 of San Luis Obispo County, the San Luis Obispo County Community Foundation, the California Health-Care Foundation, the California Endowment, and the United Way of San Luis Obispo County.

County Clinical Lab Provides Services to Physicians, Clinics

The San Luis Obispo County Clinical Lab, a JACHO and CLIA certified laboratory, performs a wide range of high-complexity clinical testing, and delivers outstanding service. Technologically advanced equipment supports fast, accurate results to their clients and patients. Patient privacy, comfort and safety are paramount concerns in the delivery of their services.

The expert staff is available six days a week to serve your patient's needs. For patient convenience, they now provide more satellite draw stations and courier service from South County to North County. Their phlebotomists are experts on the special needs of newborn, children and geriatric patients.

The lab offers affordable pricing. Most major carriers are accepted for insurance billing, including Medicare, Medi-Cal and State Family Planning.

As a full service clinical laboratory, they offer services in hematology, serology, mycology, microbiology, immunology, chemistry, urinalysis and blood bank.

They serve San Luis Obispo's local oncologists, obstetrical physicians, pediatricians and many private practice physicians.

Package programs include:

- Pre-employment physicals
- Physician wellness programs
- Drug screening

New clients are welcome. For more information or to get started, call Clinical Lab Manager Teri Prince at 781-4242.

WORKING TOGETHER

Public Health & Clinical Labs

Thomas Maier, PhD, Lab Dir.
SLO PUBLIC HEALTH LAB
2191 Johnson Avenue
San Luis Obispo, CA 93401

Sharon Beccacio, P.H. Lab Supv
SLO PUBLIC HEALTH LAB
2191 Johnson Avenue
San Luis Obispo, CA 93401

Teri Prince, Clinical Lab Mgr.
SLO COUNTY CLINICAL LAB
1551 Bishop Street #130
San Luis Obispo, CA 93401

781-5507
781-4242



Tips for “Welcome to Medicare” Visits

Don't let Medicare preventive visit structure keep your physicians waiting.

Approach the “Welcome to Medicare” visit with a plan in place that allows your staff to work as a team to keep patients moving without delay. Have the patient arrive at your office at least 30 minutes prior to appointment time. The patient will spend that time completing any screening tools and patient information forms required.

Bill GO344 (\$97.40, par, national, office) for the Welcome to Medicare visit. A separate EKG (G0366, \$26.91, par, national, office) may also be billed with the exam in your office. An appropriate diagnosis code would be acceptable for this service. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) estimates 200,000 patients nationwide will become eligible for this new service each month.

Allow extra staff time for patients scheduled to have an EKG in your office. The challenge you may face is that staff time for the service is longer than physician time and that could slow down the process for smaller practices with limited staff.

The definition of the exam portion of the service requires only a patient's vitals – height, weight, blood pressure and visual acuity – be taken. A lot of the visit time is for counseling and for the patient to fill out screening tools.

San Luis Obispo County Reported Cases of Selected Communicable Diseases - Spring 2005

Disease	January	February	March	Total 2005	Total 2004
AIDS	3	0	1	4	8
Amebiasis	0	0	0	1	1
Brucellosis	0	1	0	1	1
Campylobacter	7	7	6	20	43
Chlamydia	48	34	38	120	473
Coccidioidomycosis	9	15	9	33	76
Cryptosporidiosis	1	1	1	3	53
E. Coli 0157:H7	1	0	0	1	2
Giardia	1	6	1	8	11
PPNG	0	0	0	0	0
Gonorrhea	6	2	6	14	37
Hepatitis A	0	1	1	2	4
Hepatitis B	5	11	1	17	41
Hepatitis C Acute	1	0	0	1	0
Hepatitis C Chronic	51	62	15	128	411
Hepatitis, Unspecified	0	0	0	0	1
Listeriosis	1	0	0	1	0
Measles (Rubeola)	0	0	0	0	0
Meningitis - Total	4	1	4	9	38
Meningitis - Viral	3	0	4	7	31
Meningitis, H-Flu	0	0	0	0	0
Meningococcal Disease	0	0	0	0	0
Pertussis	0	1	1	2	0
Rubella	0	0	0	0	0
Salmonellosis	1	2	2	5	26
Shigellosis	0	0	0	0	2
Syphilis - Total	2	1	4	7	15
Tuberculosis	0	2	0	2	2
West Nile Fever	0	0	0	0	0
W. Nile Virus Neuroinvasive	0	0	0	0	1



San Luis Obispo County
Public Health Department
P.O. Box 1489
San Luis Obispo, CA 93406